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SUBJECT: Senegal: GOS adopts Tough Stand Against Street Demonstrators.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 21, Senegalese police arrested seven people, including one attorney, during an unauthorized demonstration in Dakar. The demonstrators were protesting against the demolition of a local soccer stadium that is now earmarked for a major business project allegedly orchestrated by the Mayor of Dakar, Pape Diop, in partnership with businessmen from China. End Summary.

Business not soccer

¶2. (SBU) In 2004, the Mayor of Dakar decided to give to the State the Assane Diouf Stadium, a large dirt pitch used by citizens living in the Plateau (where the Embassy is located), Medina, and Geule Tapee districts, for a "public utility project." In return the citizens of the area were to receive an alternate location for their soccer pitch. In reality, this deal never materialized as promised and instead, in 2008 when the whole country was focused on the annual pilgrimage to Touba, bulldozers demolished the stadium in order to make way for the "Kawsara" project, a 16 billion CFA (32 million dollars) Chinese-built commercial center. Faced with resistance from young activists from the area, the GOS shelved the project for a year, but now seem determined to begin construction - if necessary, by force.

Seven arrests, including one attorney

¶3. (SBU) On February 21, youth from the Rebeuss neighborhood where the stadium is located called for a demonstration to protest against the loss of their stadium. As usual, the Prefect of Dakar forbade the demonstration on the grounds that it would "be a threat to public order." And, as usual, the organizers ignored this prohibition, which led the police to use force to disperse the demonstrators. Three young people from the neighborhood and four opposition leaders who were holding a political rally in the area were arrested.

GOS accuses opposition

¶4. (SBU) In a press release, the GOS accused the coalition of opposition parties of purposely ignoring the local government edict and using the issue as a publicity stunt. Two opposition leaders, Khalifa Sall, who is the leader of the opposition list for the position of Mayor of Dakar, and Ali Haidar, the chairman of the Ecological Party, took part in the demonstration sustaining minor injuries from rubber bullets. Sall went to the police to ask to be arrested in solidarity with two members of his campaign team, but the police turned him away. He told Poloff, "They did not want to give my campaign any publicity by throwing me in jail."

Freed on bail

¶5. (SBU) After two nights in police custody, the three youth from Rebeuss were charged with "threatening public order" and released on bail. The other four, who were arrested in a car as they were leaving a political rally that was concomitantly taking place in the area, were also released on bail. The car was being driven by attorney Birame Sassooum Sy, who is an opposition candidate and

leader of the list of candidates for the local government of Medina and the Regional Council of Dakar. He, Thioye Ba, and Birane Kane, members of the Socialist Party, as well as Ndiaye Ba of the Socialist Front, a small party represented at the National Assembly, were all charged with "insulting law enforcement officers." The fourth occupant of the vehicle, Moussa Taye, managed to escape arrest by running away. Taye is one of the coordinators of the campaign for the opposition in Dakar. He joked with Embassy staff that "a coordinator should not let himself be caught! That would defeat the object of the exercise."

Abuse and Corruption

¶6. (SBU) These arrests are a continuation of a trend whereby the government is bent on limiting any opposition demonstrations, even though this right is enshrined in the constitution. While in police custody the rights of the detained were violated. One of them, Cheikh Ahmed Tijane Radji, a hip hop singer, had his dreadlocks cut off. Thioye Ba and Birane Kane told Embassy staff that they were held, twenty people to a small cell, in appallingly unhygienic conditions. When they asked for a broom to clean the cell they were told by officers that the broom cupboard was locked. Kane said he was eye-witness to blatant corruption in the main police station of Dakar, as those who could pay 20,000 CFA (USD 40) were allowed to go out to stretch their legs and make extended calls. Attorney Biram Sassoum Sy told Embassy that the circumstances of their arrest were very violent as police first insulted and then took them by force from his car. A lawyer involved in the case told Embassy that, even after receiving bail, all seven men were purposely handcuffed to go to an adjacent office to conclude the administrative formalities for their release.

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Comment

¶7. (SBU) A prominent opposition leader told Embassy that the only language that Wade and his party really understand is violence and he and his colleagues will not miss any opportunity to take their political battle to the streets. However, so far, and as underlined by the meager turnout at the Rebeuss demonstration, it is not clear that the people are yet ready to follow them down this road.
Bernicat